DISTRICT REVIEW REPORT

Name of School District: School District 64 (Gulf Islands)

Board Chair: May McKenzie

Superintendent of Schools: Wendy Herbert

Dates of External Team Visit: January 12 – 15, 2002

District Review Team: Glenda Bilinsky, Parent, BCCPAC; Gary Doi, Superintendent, SD67 (Chair); Linda Kaser, Ministry, School Improvement; Cathy McCubbin, Teacher, SD52; Gail Sumanik, Principal, BCPVPA; Heather Walker, Ministry, Field Liaison.

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The prime purpose of the District Review was to report out to the public, the school district and the Ministry of Education on the district's progress towards improving student achievement. In addition, as this particular Review was a pilot project, it will yield important feedback and advice to the Ministry of Education about the District Review model and process.

The District Review Team would like to commend the staff, parents, School Board and Superintendent of the Gulf Islands School District for volunteering to field-test the Ministry of Education's student achievement accountability model for school districts. The Team was very appreciative of the warm island hospitality, positive support and shared leadership in undertaking this pilot project.

During the four day visit to the Gulf Islands, the Team met with parents and staff of 9 of the 11 schools in the district (Fernwood, Fulford, GISS, Mayne, Pender, Phoenix High, Phoenix Elem, SIMS, SSE). Although a visit to all sites was not possible, Saturna Elementary was represented by the principal of Mayne/Saturna and Galiano Community School provided written responses to the 10 points of inquiry. The focus of the meetings was to review the school plans for improving student achievement in the context of the District Accountability Contract. The Team also met with the District Leadership team; the Program Delivery Task Force; the Gulf Island Teachers Association President; a member of the CUPE executive; and a member of the District Parent Advisory Council. At the conclusion of its Review, the Team provided the District executive, Board and partner groups with an overview of the report in its draft form.

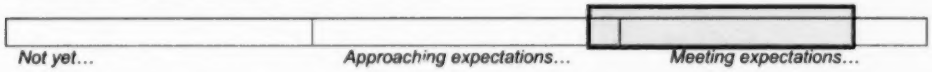
School District 64 is a small school district with schools and communities on the islands of Galiano, Mayne, Pender Islands, Salt Spring and Saturna. As island communities, they are unique with their individual character and culture. Yet, they share many common features. They are a centre for the arts. They enjoy the qualities of the Canadian West Coast – outstanding outdoor recreation, mild climate and a rich diversity of people. In many ways, the Gulf Islands is a "Community of Islands".

This "Community of Islands" is, in the view of the District Review Team, also developing a well-deserved reputation as a "Community of Learners". It was clearly evident that the School District is developing an inquiring learning community based on positive relationships, school-community-district partnerships, innovative thinking and a focus on improving student achievement for all learners.

This report is, therefore, intended to assist the School District in enhancing its vision of a "Community of Learners" by identifying: observations based on 10 key areas of inquiry; district's strengths; promising practices; and recommendations for improving student achievement.

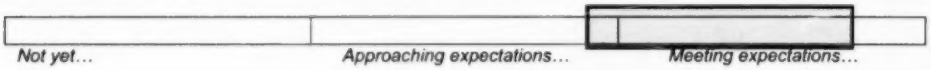
B. **OBSERVATIONS: 10 KEY AREAS OF INQUIRY**
(Note: As feature of this pilot project, the Review Team decided to use a scoring guide to illustrate the district's progress in each area.)

1. Goals:
(Improving districts have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in clear goals for improving student achievement.)



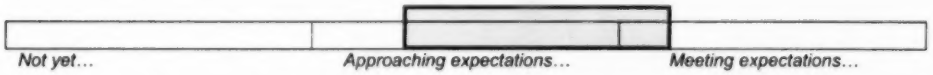
- The district has developed clear goals for improving student learning in literacy, the achievement of boys and safety/social responsibility.
- Schools are continuing to refine and clarify their goals.

2. Rationale:
(Improving districts have a thorough research and community-based set of reasons for the selection of their student achievement goals.)



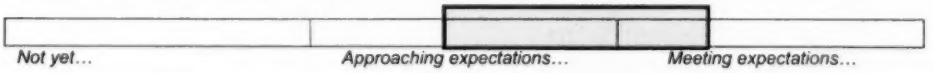
- The rationale for the district goals is sensible and accurate.

3. Data:
(Improving districts have identified at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school and district/provincial levels. The analysis of this evidence has informed the selection of the district goals.)



- The data sources identified in the district plan are thoughtful; the intention is to draw from classroom, school and district evidence sources.
- Now is the time to develop a process to ensure district-wide consistency in data collection at the district, school and classroom level.
- Many schools are coming to terms with the importance and value of using school/classroom evidence in their improvement plans.

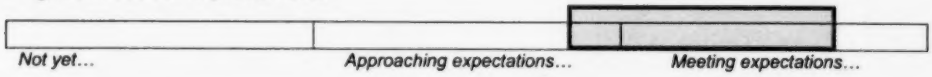
4. Strategies:
(Improving districts have a well-organized, focused improvement plan in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.)



- The district has an emerging repertoire of strategies for obtaining improved student learning results.
- There is a highly motivated, strategies-based district-wide leadership team.
- The district Early Success Program is clearly focused on improving student achievement. The Team observed a variety of ways that schools approach early literacy including the training and use of Special Education Assistants.

5. Structures:

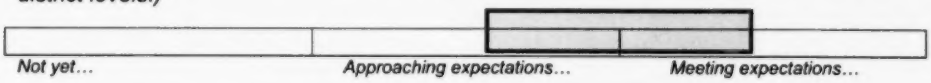
(Improving districts have shifted structures – resources, time, organization – to get the results they want. This includes effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



- The district has been effective in shifting fiscal, human and time resources to create and support a thriving learning community.
- Several schools have been innovative in changing structures to support their school goals and student achievement.

6. Results:

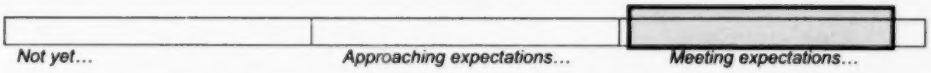
(Improving districts get improved student learning results – at the classroom, school and district levels.)



- The district is at the initial stages of developing and implementing focused improvement plans.
- Several schools have very promising practices at collecting results-based evidence.

7. Communication:

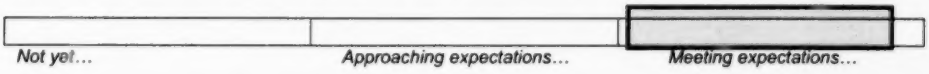
(Improving districts ensure that both the education community and the broader community being served are aware of the improvement goals and the progress being made.)



- The annual district planning retreat which involves all partner groups is a valued and effective strategy for communication about district goals and school improvement. All schools send teams with representatives of middle and secondary students, parents and staff to the annual retreat.
- Most schools have well established strategies for communicating with parents.
- The challenge of communicating in a multi-island community is being addressed in a variety of ways.

8. Partnership – District & School Coherence

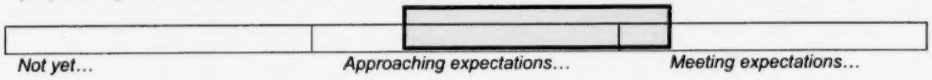
(Improving districts have a dynamic and interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school-district directions are both valued.)



- The growth plan/accountability cycle is well thought out and responsive to community culture and clearly values school uniqueness and district responsibilities.

9. Partnership – District & Parent Involvement

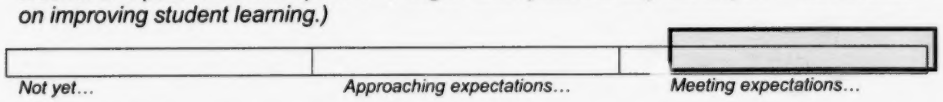
(Improving districts work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents.)



- The involvement of parents in the process of setting goals and plans varies from highly involved to just getting started.
- Parent participation in schools is wide and varied and the district offers parents opportunities to be involved and informed. At this point, parents' knowledge of the district accountability goals is not widespread.

10. Leadership/teamwork:

(Improving districts are led by district leaders with a clear vision for and commitment to school improvement and improving student achievement. Principals, vice-principals, and teacher and parent leadership is encouraged and systematically developed – with a focus on improving student learning.)



- There is a clear vision about and commitment to school improvement across roles and communities.
- In this district, shared leadership and teamwork are a district-wide way of life.

C. STRENGTHS OF THE DISTRICT

- Staff and parents at all levels are valued and supported by the school district. Many staff mentioned the openness and lack of hierarchy. Parents, teachers and support staff feel comfortable expressing their views and in contacting district staff and Board members.

- There is a high level of community involvement in the district. For example, a program on safety and social responsibility that was developed by community members has been successfully integrated into the middle and secondary school. As well, many parents and community members volunteer in schools to assist with curricular and extracurricular programs.

- The Program Delivery Task Force is a force with which to be reckoned! The combined experience, knowledge and skills of the Task Force members help to model effective practice in the schools and district.

- The District Executive and Board of School Trustees are respected by and respectful of all partners in the school system.

D. PROMISING PRACTICES

- The Annual Improvement Model (AIM) is a systematic model linked to school goals that encourages personal and professional development.

- The growth plan and improvement cycle focuses on student achievement, provides opportunities for contributions and ownership from all partner groups and builds in accountability at all levels of the school system.

- The annual retreat process involves partner groups (students, teachers, principals and vice-principals, parents, support staff, trustees and community members) as active participants in the establishment of district goals.

- Schools are involved in analyzing the data around the achievement of boys and developing strategies to improve boys' success in school.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

GOALS:
Your growth planning cycle makes good sense. Continue building on your tradition of purposeful interaction and involvement of all partners in developing your goals and:

- Work with schools on the development of a few clear, focused goals.

- Use the number of students meeting or exceeding expectations as the target. Avoid using provincial and/or regional averages as performance targets. Aim high for your students!

ASSESSMENT:
Assessment AS, and FOR, learning is central to teaching effectiveness. Therefore:

- Use performance standards as the shared vehicle for data collection at both school and district levels. Performance standards value teacher professional judgement, allow multiple assessments over time, and teach the language of self-assessment. Use them!

STRATEGIES:
An inquiring learning community, judicious use of strategies and the use of regular thoughtful evidence/data/measures will help to create improved student learning results. Therefore:

- Collect and study the data to test the effectiveness of your strategies at both the school and district levels.

- Think about the impact of connecting your strategies across goals.

- Expand the Annual Improvement Model to include action-research teams working on improving student learning.

PARTNERSHIPS: DISTRICT & PARENT INVOLVEMENT:
Parent involvement is positively linked to improving student achievement. Therefore:

- Parent and district leaders need to engage the greater parent community in district and school plans to improve student learning.